

**PRESS CONFERENCE:**

**Major General Kevin J. Bergner, Spokesman, Multi-National Force – Iraq**

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**PARTICIPANTS:**

**Major General Kevin Bergner**

**REPORTERS:**

**Ahmed Jassem from Arabiya Newspaper  
Jim Glanz from The New York Times  
Lourdes Garcia Navarro from National Public Radio  
James Hart from the London Times  
Sam Dagher from The Christian Science Monitor  
Alexandra Zavis from The Los Angeles Times**

**Unidentified reporters from Al-Watan Newspaper, Al-Watan TV, Kurdistan TV,  
and Al-Zaman Newspaper.**

**REPORTERS 1-15**

**\*REP1 = REPORTER 1**

**\*INT = INTERPRETER**

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

Good afternoon everyone. This has been a difficult and challenging few days. It has also been a period of significant effort by the Iraqi government and their security forces to deal with violence that criminal activity has been contributing to. This afternoon, I'd like to talk in particular about events in Basra as well as here in Baghdad. Turning first to operations underway in Basra, it's important to note that these operations have been undertaken by the Iraqi Security Forces based on decisions and direction of the Prime Minister with his national security ministers – completely an Iraqi initiative. Prime Minister Maliki specifically said that he took these actions because “the lawlessness is going on under religious or political cover, along with smuggling of oil, weapons, and drugs. These outlaws found support from inside government institutions, either willingly or by coercion, turning Basra into a place where citizens struggled to feel secure for their lives and property.” Iraqi operations in Basra also reflect the growing ability of the Iraqi Security Forces, the Iraqi decision-making, and Iraqi leadership. A year ago, it was a significant challenge to move Iraqi Army units to Baghdad to augment forces here at the beginning of Operation Fardh Al-Qanoon. But in the past week, Iraqi leaders directed forces that are the equivalent of some two brigades to move to Basra and undertake operations there. These forces have included

emergency response units, special operations forces, Iraqi helicopters, and conventional forces. In addition, the prime minister and his council of security ministers are personally involved. A year ago, the Iraqi Security Forces would have struggled to move this force. They would not have been able to support it, and it would have been difficult for the government then to take this strong position against the criminals. Enforcement of the rule of law in Basra is not a battle against Jaish al-Mahdi as some have suggested. Nor is it a proxy war between the United States and Iran, as others have purported. It is the Government of Iraq taking responsible action necessary to deal with criminals on the streets with weapons. The involvement of coalition forces is limited to the normal transition teams that are embedded with the Iraqi Security Forces. It also includes liaison elements from the Multi-National Force and Multi-National Division – Southeast who are collocated with the Basra Operational Command. And there are some air assets being made available as needed to support the Iraqi operations on the ground. In Baghdad, coalition and Iraqi Security Forces have been and will continue to be focused on those breaking the law, and they are exercising significant restraint in those operations. We have not, for example, indiscriminately returned fire on the locations from which rockets have been launched. We have not undertaken large-scale operations against neighborhoods just because that is where

the indirect fire originated from. We have and will continue to show restraint in dealing with those who honor al-Sayyed Muqtada al-Sadr's pledge of honor to halt attacks. We have and will continue to help Iraqi Security Forces enforce the rule of law and target those Quds Force-backed special groups and other criminals who unleash indiscriminate violence in Iraq. And what remains most important is the support of law-abiding Iraqi citizens to identify those responsible for the criminal behavior and work closely with both their security forces and the coalition. Those who are firing rockets into the International Zone and other Baghdad neighborhoods are criminals who are dishonoring Sadr's pledge of honor and they are placing the lives of innocent Iraqi citizens at risk. Our operations are not directed at Jaish al-Mahdi. They are not directed at members of the Sadr Trend. They are directed at individuals who are breaking the law. Indeed, we have welcomed the opportunity to dialog with al-Sayyed Muqtada al-Sadr's leaders, and have done so at the local level to encourage reconciliation and other initiatives like the ceasefire. The suggestion that coalition forces and Iraqi Security Forces are targeting individuals because of their political affiliation is simply incorrect. We are targeting criminals regardless of their political affiliation or their other associations. People who break the law are arrested and subject to the rule of law. This is focused on criminals. Whether in Baghdad or Basra or other

communities in Iraq, no one wants to see a return to the violence of a year ago. The Iraqis that I speak with want to move forward and build on the security gains that have been achieved through enormous sacrifice. They do not want to go backwards. They want to see roads that were once closed reopened like we saw this week in the Nissan District of Baghdad. They want to see schools opened and businesses bringing in the commodities that they need. They tell me they want to have the freedom to come and go to work without threats and intimidation. They want their neighbors to respect the sovereignty of Iraq. And they expect their government to take the actions necessary to remove the criminals from the streets so that all of that can happen. And with that, I will take your questions this afternoon. Yes, sir.

**REP1:** [Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:** Question from Al-Watan Newspaper. A few days ago we've heard that there is a desire by the United States to coordinate with the British government to bring back the British forces to Basra. If this is true, will—have you addressed the British government regarding this?

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

Well, first of all, let me say that the British forces that remain in Basra are there specifically to help enable and partner with Iraqi Security Forces, and they are still there operating in the province of Basra. I think that the decisions, the deployment of Iraqi Security Forces, and the leadership and direction of the Government of Iraq in the last few days demonstrates that the Government of Iraq takes very seriously their responsibility and their capability to project force into provinces that have achieved provincial Iraqi control and to assert the necessary security forces to enforce the rule of law. And so, this is less about the coalition forces in the province of Basra than it is about Iraqi Security Forces and the leadership of the Government of Iraq in implementing plans necessary to deal with criminal activity. Shukran. Yes, sir.

**REP2:**

[Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:**

Ahmed Jassem from Arabiya Newspaper. Yesterday, we went to some areas inside Baghdad and we have found that members of the security are few...Is that an indication that they are collaborating with the militias? And what is your stance from the recent events

that is going on inside Baghdad? Thank you.

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

Thank you. First, let me say that...what I understand in terms of the overall security situation in Baghdad yesterday and into this morning. We are aware of three reported incidents of organized groups demonstrating or conveying some concern during the course of the day yesterday. One numbered around 50 people. Another numbered around 100 to 150 people. And the third one numbered several hundred. All of them were peaceful and they...exactly what they were organizing themselves to do is not as clear, but those are the three incidents of organized demonstrations or those activities that we are aware of. And we are also aware of three incidents where Iraqi Security Force checkpoints were challenged by extremists. And in all three of those instances the combination of Iraqi forces and coalition forces were able to maintain control in the place where that confrontation took place and maintain the security force presence there as well. There have been instances of people who have been exposed to threats and intimidation and told not to go to work in some neighborhoods, and we are aware of that, and we're working with Iraqi Security Forces on that front as well. But overall, there is...there has been a continuation of the security in Baghdad and even in the face of those incidents that I discussed.

Did I answer your question? Shukran.

**REP2:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** And the American forces as well, they have a few presence...a limited presence in the streets right now.

**MAJ GEN BERGNER:** Well, the American...the United States forces, the coalition forces, are continuing to work very closely with the Iraqi Security Forces across the city. And again, as I mentioned in my remarks, their focus is on criminal activity. They are working to ensure the rule of law and to help the Iraqi Security Forces continue to enforce the rule of law. And there have been some confrontations in the last day and a half, and they are working very well with the Iraqi Security Forces to deal with those. Shukran. Jim.

**REP3:** Hi, General. Jim Glanz. The New York Times. I was down in Basra ten days ago or so and some senior Iraqi official indicated that they would be going into the city. I guess what puzzles me in this case is that if the coalition forces aren't directly involved in this operation – the operational part of it – and you know that large portions of



Basra are controlled by militias, you know, how do you distinguish this operation from basically an occupation of the city? I mean, you've characterized it as going down there to get isolated bad guys. There are large portions around the port which is thought to be controlled by Fadillah-controlled militias. You've got portions of the city controlled by the Mahdi. And then there is the Badr Organization. How can you be confident that the Iraqi forces are going down there and selectively pulling bad guys out of the mix as opposed to really just kind of coming in and taking over the town? And second, you know, what would that really mean, given that so much of the city is controlled by these sort of informal or militia elements as opposed to the Iraqi Security Forces? And are you watching those things?

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

Well, first of all, let me go back to what the prime minister stated as the rationale for the Government of Iraq to take the actions that they are taking. He specifically pointed to the lawlessness and the cover that it's trying to be perpetrated under. He pointed to the lack of security that citizens of Basra were increasingly exposed to. And so, I think he stated quite clearly a very straightforward and candid assessment that warranted the deployment of additional Iraqi forces to specifically address the challenges that you described. Now, how those Iraqi Security Forces conduct their operations, and exactly

how much support they get from the citizens of Basra in dealing with the criminal activity is something that's developing and will continue to develop in the next few days. Initially...the initial reports are that they are making progress and they have had some tough encounters in their initial day or so of operations. But this will—I think a large part of the determinant, in answering your question, will be the citizens of Basra and how they respond to the efforts of the central government to deploy and employ the forces necessary to improve the security situation overall. And we have seen in numerous other places in Iraq, as you know, that at the local level, local citizens want to see that; they welcome the effort by security forces; they want to see their neighborhoods returned to the rule of law. And I think the prime minister's personal presence, along with his other national security ministers there, is also a strong statement of the level of commitment that the central government has to achieving that in conjunction with the provincial authorities as well. Yes, ma'am.

**REP4:** Lourdes Garcia Navarro. National Public Radio. Hello.

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:** Hi.

**REP4:** The question I have is we're receiving reports that there is fighting

between Mahdi Army militia members and Sahwa groups which the United States military has stood up. My question is, how much control do you have over Sahwa groups? These are obviously irregular forces that don't necessarily fall under any chain of command. They obviously have somewhat of a history with the Mahdi Army in Baghdad. Should this become a problem, how is the U.S. military going to deal with it, considering that they are the ones that stood up these groups?

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

Yeah. Well, first of all, as you know, the Sahwa, the Awakening, so to speak, is a result of a decision by both tribal leaders and local leaders to reject the violence in their communities. And it's a response to the indiscriminate violence and the corrupt ideology and the oppressive practices that al-Qaeda, in particular, had imposed on these communities. And so, the local security forces, the Sons of Iraq as we refer to them now, came from a conscious decision to reject that violence and return their communities to a place that was secure, where the kinds of things that we just talked about could take place—where people could come and go, where they could open their businesses again, where kids could go to school, and they were free of the oppression. That's a very courageous step for someone to take, because it has, as you know, exposed them to significant risk as a result. They have been targeted by al-Qaeda, in

particular, as al-Qaeda has sought to reassert itself in some of those communities. As I have visited some of those places and talked to members of the local security forces, I've been struck by the certainty of their decision and the fact that they want to go forward and they want their government...they want to become part of the Government of Iraq's solution in moving forward. So, some of them will seek to join the Iraqi Security Forces. And I think today that number is around 6,000 that have made it through the process of vetting, screening, application, and acceptance. In some cases, they have already been hired conditionally as members of the police force. And there are some 2,000 or 3,000 others who are currently in that pipeline, and there are more lists and more nominations being submitted every day. So there is a commitment by the Government of Iraq to bring those who seek to serve in the legitimate security forces of Iraq into those security forces and provide that opportunity. For the others, once the security situation in their communities no longer requires that level of volunteer security effort, there is an effort underway to ensure there are vocational and technical education programs and that there are employment programs to help provide them a legitimate way of rejoining the workforce in their community and pursuing a livelihood not tied specifically to security. And so, both of those are developing and moving forward, which is, I think most importantly,

it's a signal of the commitment of the Government of Iraq to provide for those who have made that decision in those communities.

**REP4:** I'm sorry. That doesn't speak to the question about fighting with the Mahdi Army. It's not a problem of al-Qaeda influen...you know, coming into their area; it's a question of the Mahdi Army, which brings up, of course, the specter of sectarian violence. These are still sort of the same groups and they are still here on the ground, the ones that caused all the difficulties obviously in 2006 and 2007.

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:** Yeah.

**REP4:** So if you could speak to that in particular.

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:** Well, I would start with al-Sayyed Muqtada al-Sadr's commitment in which he pledged to halt the attacks and he has told his followers, the faithful ones, to honor his pledge and to respect that. And that includes those kinds of sectarian attacks that led to the spiral of violence that we all know so painfully Iraq has come...has largely come through in the last several months. So, no one wants to see a return to that. And we are working very closely and Iraqi Security Forces and coalition forces work closely with the local security

forces, so they are not independent operators. They are not out there on their own. And they are not...we do not want them to be put in a position where they are exposed to that either. So, we are taking it very seriously and we work to keep that from happening. Yes, sir.

**REP5:** James Hider from the London Times. You said that there had been discussions with low-level members of the Jaish al-Mahdi in the Sadrist office. Are those discussions going on? And what exactly did you agree before this operation started? Have they in any way signed off on this was the first question? And secondly, what is the plan if the Iraqi forces can't take Basra? The British were there for five years, thousands of troops and we got into this mess anyway. Is there any plan for reinforcements, for coalition troops to go in if the Army can't take Basra? And I hear that they've been repulsed from one area, Al-Hanaya, already by the Mahdi Army?

**MAJ GEN BERGNER:** What was the first part of your question?

**REP5:** It was the talks with the Jaish al-Mahdi.

**MAJ GEN BERGNER:** Oh, yeah. Okay. Well, first let me start with that. At the local level, coalition commanders have talked to members of the Jaish al-Mahdi on an unexceptional basis in an effort to try to improve security in

neighborhoods in different districts. And so, lieutenant colonels and brigade commanders have engaged and will continue to engage in dialog with all those who seek to improve security in the districts and neighborhoods that they are responsible for. And that has included members who are associated with Jaish al-Mahdi in the past and it is not specifically tied to anything today. So I think...I don't want to mislead you that there is some recent discussion or interaction underway. That's not what I intended.

**REP5:** [Unintelligible] talks on at the moment. There've been talks [unintelligible].

**MAJ GEN BERGNER:** I can't tell you if there are battalion commanders out there today talking to members of Jaish al-Mahdi, but they have in the past, and where there is a basis to help improve the security situation we continue to...we will always be willing to talk to folks on that level.

**REP5** And if the Army can't take Basra?

**MAJ GEN BERGNER:** And I guess what I would say is that's quite a hypothetical question to start with at this point in time. And as...I would go back to the beginning of this discussion, where we pointed out that these are Iraqi decisions. These are Iraqi forces. And there are Iraqi

government leaders directing and implementing these operations. We have great respect for them and the minister of defense and the minister of interior and their subordinates' abilities to press this and press forward. And I think the level of commitment evidenced by the prime minister's presence there and his national security minister's should be a very strong statement about the level of commitment that they intend to bring to this effort. So, I wouldn't get into judging too quickly levels of progress or where it might lead after just a day and a half or so. Yes, sir.

**REP6:** [Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:** Question from Al-Watan TV. When dealing with Jaish al-Mahdi. Could you deal with them as an entire entity that doesn't comply with the statements with Muqtada al-Sadr? Or there are some groups that still don't comply because some of them complied to Muqtada al-Sadr's commitment, and some of them didn't. So how would you deal with those groups?

**MAJ GEN BERGNER:** Well, we have said all along that those groups who honor al-Sayyed Muqtada al-Sadr's pledge and abide by his commitment to halt the attacks would be shown restraint by the coalition and Iraqi Security Forces; indeed, because they would, in fact, be complying with the



rule of law. And that those who do not honor that pledge, who violate that, would not be shown the same level of restraint because, indeed, they would be violating the law and they are criminals. We have seen the Quds Force-backed special groups in particular, who have acted independently of the guidance and the direction that has come from the Sadr Trend, and those continue to be a danger to the Iraqi people, Iraqi Security Forces, and our forces as well, because of their indiscriminate violence, the indirect fire attacks that we have all continued to experience here in Baghdad, and other neighborhoods I should point out in Baghdad—not just here around the International Zone—are a reflection of those who are outside the pledge of honor made by al-Sayyed Muqtada al-Sadr. Shukran. Yes.

**REP7:** [Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:** The Iraqi government and Jaish al-Mahdi or Mahdi Army, exchange...or Prime Minister Maliki gave...the government gave the armed men three days to surrender their weapons. And what is the stance of the American Army regarding these discussions between the Government of Iraq and Jaish al-Mahdi, because no solution has been reached so far? Do you think things are being more tense[sic] until now?

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

Let me just ask my interpreter to take me through the very last part one more time.

**INT:**

Do you think the discussions will work out between the Government of Iraq and Jaish al-Mahdi because the Government of Iraq gave three days to members of the JAM to relinquish their weapon?

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

Thanks. Okay. Shukran. The guidance that the prime minister issued was specifically from the Government of Iraq and it was specifically to compel a compliance with the rule of law in those places where they are conducting operations. And so, we take very seriously his guidance and his direction and we hope that those who are in violation of that take it equally seriously. And I think he has clearly stated and demonstrated through the deployment of forces and with the operations that are underway that he intends to press for those who do not comply with his guidance, he is willing to use the necessary force to bring the rule of law back to those communities. Shukran. Yes, sir.

**REP8:**

I know it's only been a day and a half, but could you give us some update on how the campaign in Basra is going? A couple of other

questions about Basra. To what extent are you worried about the Sadr ceasefire coming apart, given the fighting in Basra? What do you think has kept a lid on the ceasefire so far? And just in general, how important is the ceasefire?

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

Well, let me start with that, first. The recent statements by Nassar Rubai and other members of the Sadr Trend have explicitly said that they have remained committed to the ceasefire, and that they continue to comply with the guidance that Muqtada al-Sadr gave in regard to the ceasefire. And as I mentioned in my remarks earlier, we welcome that, and we believe that's very important to the overall security and the opportunities to move forward, both from the standpoint of national reconciliation, but also in terms of improving the overall security and stability in Iraq. Your question about Basra in terms of how things are going there, the Iraqi Security Forces have moved in the neighborhood of about 2,000 members of their security forces to support operations in the city. They made initial movements into the city yesterday, and they have continued to press into different neighborhoods and districts over the course of the day. They have imposed a curfew, we understand. And that that curfew is being complied with by the residents of the city. And they are continuing to press into those areas that we talked about which are still somewhat...that are contentious and are going

to require some tough operations for them to regain control of. But again, really, just 36 hours into this, and so we'll see how it develops over the next several days. Yes, sir.

**REP9:** [Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:** There are some provinces that does not witness...that don't witness any operations, but the curfew was imposed in those provinces. And I think this also causes some tension in those provinces.

**MAJ GEN BERGNER:** Can you tell me which specific provinces?

**INT:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**REP9:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** There are some certain provinces and other provinces that they don't witness any military operations, however, like in Babil, Karbala, Najaf, Diwaniyah, and Samawah. But the curfew was imposed on those provinces and I think this cause a tension.

**MAJ GEN BERGNER:** I see. I understand. Those decisions are a result of assessments by the leaders of the Iraqi Security Forces in those areas and those assessments could well be related to their concern that operations in

an a adja-...in a nearby province could spark instability or could spark problems in that province and so they take a prudent approach, which is to implement a curfew, to forestall the prospects of a decline in security there for the citizens of that province. And so that's a decision that's made by the local Iraqi Security Force leadership in consultation with the governor—really to look out for the needs of the Iraqi citizens there and to limit the prospects of problems crossing over from one area to another. So, I suspect that is what you are asking about, and that's the logic I think that the Iraqi Security Forces and their civilian leaders would consider. Shukran. Yes, sir.

**REP10:**

Hi. You talked about the plan here in Basra. A couple of questions on that. If we look ahead, the plan is for Iraqi Security Forces to go into Basra and do exactly what? Is it to set up a permanent presence down there? Are they going to change the police force? Do you know what the government is sort of aiming to do in Basra with the Iraqi Security Forces? And secondly, if they do request coalition support, what is it that you can provide here in Basra?

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

Well first, Prime Minister Maliki, in his own words, said the purpose of going into Basra is to restore the rule of law and reduce the...specifically to reduce the level of lawlessness that has

undermined the citizens of Basra's ability to have secure and stable neighborhoods. So their intent is to reduce those criminal elements that have created that lawlessness. And so, they will go through the districts that have the most acute problems, and they will undertake to remove those criminal elements and stop the illegal activity that has been undermining the security and stability there. That's their...that is their purpose of their operations. They are using additional forces to undertake those missions. What the disposition of those forces is, once operations proceed, will depend on the results. It will depend on the level of cooperation and support that they get from the civilian population in those communities. It will depend on the way that the existing Iraqi Security Forces there are postured to hold once the improved...once they have accomplished their objective there. I really don't have any thought on your hypothetical question of what if they need additional support. It's very much a hypothetical, and it's too hard for me to even begin to know where to address that one. We are providing the kinds of enablers that we do with other Iraqi security operations, which includes aviation support and the typical intelligence sharing and collaboration that we provide elsewhere. Yes, sir.

**REP11:**

Sam Dagher] with the Christian Science Monitor. Thank you for the opportunity. Just a couple of questions. We were told by an Iraqi

security official in Basra who is actually taking part in the operation itself that there are U.S. and British soldiers close to the Iranian border at the moment to intercept any sort of militia or weapons movement. So if you can comment on that. Second question is, we were just in Sadr City and the whole...pretty much the whole district is ringed by U.S. troops and U.S. military vehicles. A lot of the inner roads are now closed by the militiamen themselves. They are out on the streets. They are not letting anyone go in or out. We were told...we even saw evidence perhaps that they've even booby-trapped a lot of the main roads into Sadr City and laid IEDs. Is this mission impossible? I mean, they are now among civilians. How could you get them? And also the third question is relating to...[laughs] border, Sadr City, and, oh, yesterday government checkpoints, Army and police—I mean, I saw this with my own eyes. The militiamen were right next to these checkpoints intimidating people, telling them to actually go back home, to close their shops. There was so much anti-American banners and graffiti at all these checkpoints. So...I mean doesn't this maybe lead us to question a little bit maybe the loyalty of some of these forces and whether they would be willing to fight, you know, these militiamen and criminals when push comes to shove? Thank you.

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

First, the forces that we have in Basra are the forces that we have

embedded in any...with any other Iraqi Security Forces. We have transition teams with Iraqi Army units. We have liaison officers with the Baghdad Operations Command, and they represent both the Multi-National Force and MND...Multi-National Division – Southeast. And we have the normal relationship we have with border enforcement teams, which we generally have a border enforcement transition team that helps coordinate efforts and develop capacity within the border enforcement elements as well. Those are the forces that we have in Basra. And we do not have any conventional forces there. We do not have the...there have been other reports that there were coalition forces deployed there. What we have there is what I just described. Your comment about Sadr City and the circumstance there, as you know, much of the indirect fire that has been directed towards neighborhoods here in Baghdad has emanated from the vicinity of East Baghdad and Sadr City in several cases in particular. And so, we do have a responsibility to work with the Iraqi Security Forces and interdict the ability for...of indirect fire cells to continue doing what they are doing. We have a responsibility to work with Iraqi Security Forces to enforce the rule of law against criminal activity and armed groups, illegal armed groups, that might be seeking to impose their own intimidation and coercion. And so, that is part of our normal operations and that is what we will continue to do there. I would take your last...the last



part of your question back to one point. This is about criminal activity. It's about those who are not respecting the rule of law. They are engaged in kidnapping and murder. They are engaged in coercion and intimidation. And so, Iraqi and coalition forces are continuing to operate against those, and reduce their capability to intimidate, coerce, and otherwise conduct criminal behavior. Yes, sir.

**REP12:** [Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:** Question from Kurdistan TV. You have mentioned that there are some foreign sides that stand behind the military operations in Basra. And you've mentioned also Quds Forces. Is this a direct accusation by you against Iran regarding the operations and what's going on in Basra? The second question: is there any intention...if there is any withdrawal of the British forces, will you take over responsibility there instead of the British forces in case the British forces withdrew from Basra?

**MAJ GEN BERGNER:** Well, first of all, the Government of Iraq has asked its neighbors to exert helpful influence in improving the security and stability in Iraq. The Government of Iraq has asked its neighbors to exert positive and helpful influences to improve the stability and security

here in their country. And we have certainly joined them in that interest as well. And in terms of Basra, there is no question but the Government of Iran has significant influence in Basra and in the province and in southeastern Iraq in general. And so, we would love to see the Government of Iran fulfill its commitment to help improve the security and stability and the situation there, and to reduce the activities of those operating outside the law. And our understanding is that the Government of Iraq is working closely with their neighbors, specifically to ask their improved support in improving the situation there. In terms of—what was your second question again? It was about the Brit-...I remember. It's...I got it. Your second question was about MN-...Multi-National Division – Southeast, and British forces there. The government of the UK and the leadership of the Multi-National Division there have made it very clear that they are working...they are going to continue to perform their mission. They are continuing to work with the Iraqi Security Forces, and so there really isn't a basis for me to project beyond that. There is no sense that they will do otherwise than continue their mission there. Shukran. Who have I not asked on...yes, sir.

**REP13:**

[Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:** Question from Al-Zaman Newspaper. There is some mixing in the events. The government says that those who caused troubles are those who asked for civil disobedience. And you say that the Iranian revolutionists and the Quds Force are causing this. The Iraqi citizen wants to know the truth; who is causing all those troubles?

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:** Could you just read his question one more time, please?

**INT:** He's saying that things are mixed now. You say that the Quds Force and the Iranians are part of the problem. And some reports indicate that those who asked for civil disobedience are the ones who are responsible for the troubles and events in Basra. So, there are two sides now. Who's responsible? And the Iraqi citizens want to know who's responsible for the troubles—those who initiated civil disobedience or the Quds Force? Who is responsible?

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:** Those that are responsible are the criminals that we have been talking about this afternoon. And they are armed groups that have disregarded the rule of law. They are intimidating and coercing Iraqi civilians. And those are the individuals that the Government of Iraq is conducting operations against in Basra. Shukran. Yes, ma'am.

**REP14:**

Hi. Alexandra Zavis from the LA Times. With the level of resistance that we've seen in Basra, can we still talk about a ceasefire in Basra specifically? And in the months ahead, as we sort of approach provincial elections, how much of a risk do you see of more of this kind of thing happening?

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

Well, first, I would say it would be important to give the Iraqi forces conducting operations as part of the Basra Operations Command some time to get their operations completely underway and then assess the nature of what they've accomplished. It is still very early in their operations and they are, as I said earlier, they are still developing the situation there. They are still pressing into the objective areas that they sought to establish control of. The fact that there is a good compliance with the curfew and that they are getting the support from the citizens of Basra is encouraging, and I'm sure that that will be an area that they continue to emphasize. There is no question that what the prime minister has directed and is undertaking here is intended to improve the overall security situation in Iraq. He's doing this as a result of his assessment that without this operation, there would not be a very hopeful prospect of improving security in Basra. And so, as you look forward to the prospect of elections later in the fall, the Government of Iraq, I think, is stepping up to its responsibility to set the necessary

security conditions that will be important for those elections to be undertaken. Thank you. Yes, sir.

**REP15:** [Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:** How would you describe the up-tick in the bombing or the targeting of the Green Zone? How would you describe the up-tick in targeting the Green Zone with mortars recently?

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:** Well, I would say more broadly than the International Zone, it's the effect it has on the citizens of Baghdad. There are many citizens of Baghdad who are being subjected to the indirect fire and to the risk, the danger, that that creates for them. And so, this is an incidence of criminal activity that is placing Iraqi citizens, as well as the coalition, as well as the international community who has come here to help work with the Government of Iraq, to help Iraq move forward all at risk. And it is something we take very seriously, and we'll work very hard with our Iraqi Security Force partners to deal with and are, indeed, working very hard. Sunday, amidst one of those attacks into the International Zone, after four rockets had been launched, one of our air weapons teams located the location of the indirect fire and was able to interdict the other eight rockets before they could be launched. Subsequent to that operation, they were able to locate a stock of rockets that had also been positioned for

future use and were able to take those out of action as well. And so, coalition and Iraqi forces are working very hard against the criminals who continue to put Iraqi citizens and the rest of this community at risk. I've got time for one more question.

**REP3:**

Thanks, General. We had, I think, a little bit of varying estimate of the number of troops...Iraqi troops involved. A British spokesman spoke of a higher number than 2,000 which is the one that you mentioned. So that's one question. And can you say anything about where they came from because we were all wondering once we knew there would be an offensive, gee, where do you take these guys from? Are there other provinces in the south? Are they Kurds? Are they from Basra? That's one...

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

Yeah.

**REP3:**

And then secondly, I just want to follow up on my Iraqi colleague's question. I do think it's a fair point to say one might be a little confused at this point because the focus has been al-Qaeda for a long time in terms of preserving security and stability in the country, especially on the part of the coalition. And now...and also you've spoken about the special groups and the influence of Iran on those and their effect on security. And now there's the, you know,

there's the criminals or I guess the bad guys among the militias and the coalition again is supporting this effort. How does this all fit together in terms of the overall effort by the coalition? And do you now see it necessary to sort of suppress the violence from all those groups before the United States can bring...can drawdown the troops and send some of them home?

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

Okay. First, let me start with the forces into Basra. The number that I gave you, Jim, was the additional forces that we know had just recently deployed. That's in addition—that is not in addition to the forces that were already there and Iraqi Army and Iraqi police forces. So, we will follow up with you and give you a number that represents what we understand to be the Iraqi force.

**REP3:**

There's no real conflict there perhaps.

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

No. There's not. No. I gave you a rough estimate of some of the additional forces.

**REP3:**

How many overall though?

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

That's what I said, I'll follow up with on and provide you a better sense of overall forces. And they represent a range of units. Some

of them are special mission units that will come in a more deployable package and have moved and will always move to specific areas for specific operational purposes. And some are national police units or other conventional forces, and we'll follow up with you and let you know where they have come from as well. In terms of your last question though in terms of how does this circumstance relate to the overall effort against violence in Iraq, we have said all along that the security challenge facing Iraq is very much a mosaic. It varies by geographic location. It varies by the nature of these extremists, some of which are rogue militia elements, some are these criminals and members of special groups, and some of them are part of the al-Qaeda terrorist networks. So we have consistently operated against that mosaic and apportioned our effort to address all of those security challenges. We have said all along that al-Qaeda in Iraq is the main security threat that we are concerned about and it continues to be the one that has the greatest threat to security and stability even as we conduct these operations on a very geographically-focused basis. But that's not to diminish the destabilizing fact or destabilizing capacity that these special groups and other criminals have. So it is very much a mosaic and that's how we have approached it. I thank you all very much. Shukran jaziilan and ma'salama.